

Message Text

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ACTION COME-00

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FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6223

INFO AMCONSUL CASABLANCA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAIR, ETRD, GB, US

SUBJ: AIRCRAFT FOR AIR AFFAIRES GABON

CASABLANCA FOR RCAA

REF: (A) STATE 59567; (B) STATE 48071; (C) LIBREVILLE 0219

1. UPON RECEIPT OF REF B, EMBASSY WROTE LETTER TO AIR AFFAIRES ASKING FOR WRITTEN ASSURANCES CONCERNING POINTS RAISED PARA THREEE REF B. ON MARCH 21, EMBASSY RECIVED LETTER FROM AIR AFFAIRES (COPY TO BE POUCHEO TO AF/C MARCH 25) RESPONDING TO THIS LETTER. INFORMAL TRANSLATION OF THREE KEY SENTENCES AS FOLLOWS: QUOTE WE HAVE TAKEN NOTE OF THE SANCTIONS IN OPPOSITION TO RHODESIA AND PLEDGE TO HONOR THEM. WE PLEDGE NOT TO RE-EXPORT, WITHOUT THE PREVIOUS AUTHORIZATION OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, AVIATION MATERIAL UNDER THIS PROCEDURE. WE WILL OBTAIN FROM OUR EVENTUAL CLIENTS THEIR COMPLIANCE WITH THIS REGULATION, BUT WE POINT OUT TO YOU THAT THIS YPE OF OPERATION IS IN NO WAY FORESEEN IN OUR ACTIVITIES OR THOSE OF OUR CLIENTS. END QUOTE.

2. AFTER RECEIPT REF A. EMBAOFF IN CONTACT WITH AIR AFFAIRES WHO PROVIDED FOLLOWING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:
IN PRINCIPLE PRESIDENT BONGO HAS TEN PERCENT OF SHARES
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OF AIR AFFAIRES, BUT IN FACT MOST OF REST IS DIVIDED

BETWEEN HIM AND BELLANGER, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF SOCOPA (LARGEST GABONESE CONSTRUCTION COMPANY) AND ONE OF WEALTHIEST MEN IN GABON. COMPANY SET UP FOR TWO PURPOSES (A) TO SELL BEECHCRAFT AIRPLANES IN GABON AND (B) TO PROVIDE CHARTER SERVICE INTO INTERIOR OF COUNTRY. AIR AFFAIRES REPS STATED CATEGORICALLY THAT THEY ARE AWARE OF RHODESIAN SANCTIONS, THAT THEY WILL NOT SELL PLANES TO RHODESIA OR RHODESIAN INTERESTS AND THAT THEIR ACTIVITIES WILL BE CONFINED TO GABON. THUS PLANES WILL NOT EVEN BE SOLD OUTSIDE GABON TO OTHER AFRICAN COUNTRIES.

3. QUEENAIR ALREADY REQUESTED IS FOR MINISTER OF PLAN BOUMAH. BONANZA AND TWO BARONS ARE FOR AIR AFFAIRES CHARTER SERVICE. THIRD BARON FOR DIRECTOR OF IMPORTANT LOCAL COMPANY SODIM TP. AIR AFFAIRES ALSO STATED THAT TWO MORE QUEENAIRS SCHEDULED TO FOLLOW CLOSELY BEHIND, ONE FOR SOACO, LOCAL CONSTRUCTION COMPANY, AND OTHER FOR AIR AFFAIRES. ORDERS FOR OTHER PLANES ALSO ALREADY PLANNED, AND LIST OF FIRST ELEVEN PLANES (INCLUDING ABOVE) ENCLOSED WITH AIR AFFAIRES LETTER.

4. AS EMBASSY HAS POINTED OUT NUMBEROUS TIMES, THERE IS LARGE MARKET FOR SMALL AIRPLANES IN GABON AND, AS BUSINESS CONTINUES TO BOOM HERE, MARKET WILL CONTINUE TO GROW. AMERICAN BUSINESS CAN SELL LARGE NUMBER OF AIRPLANES HERE--BOTH CESSNAS AND BEECHRAFTS--MAKING SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON U.S. BALANCE OF TRADE WITH GABON, WHICH CURRENTLY NEGATIVE. HOWEVER, CONTINUED ADMINISTRATIVE SLOW-DOWNS COULD ENDANGER THIS MARKET. ADDED FACTOR RE AIR AFFAIRES IS PRESENCE OF PRESIDENT BONGO AS IMPORTANT SHAREHOLDER. BASED ON LETTER FROM AIR AFFAIRES AS WELL AS ORAL ASSURANCES, IT EMBASSY'S OPINION THAT CURRENT LICENSE REQUESTS SHOULD BE IMMEDIATELY GRANTED AND FUTURE REQUESTS GRANTED EXPEDITIOUSLY. IN ABSENCE OF ANY EVIDENCE OF AIR AFFAIRES DEALING WITH RHODESIANS, EMBASSY DOES NOT BELIEVE IT IS EITHER FAIR OR COMMERCIALLY ADVANTAGEOUS TO PENALIZE AIR AFFAIRES BECAUSE ANOTHER TOTALLY UNRELATED GABONESE COMPANY (AFRETTAIR) BROKE RHODESIAN SANCTIONS.

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5. AMBASSADOR LEAVING FOR CONSULTATIONS IN WASHINGTON MARCH 23 AND WILL WISH TO DISCUSS ISSUE OF SMALL PLANE SALES IN GABON WHILE THERE.
MCKESSON

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